THE LONDON TIMES' COLLAPSE.

(Reprinted from the New York Nation by request.)

When the London Times produced the Parnell letter in facsimile in March, 1887, we said of it, among other things, that "it would probably turn out to be a clumsy forgery like the Morey letter, and that its appearance was made doubly suspicious by the fact that it appeared on the very day on which a division was expected on the second reading of the Coercion Bill." This has proved to have been a tolerably correct forecast. It now appears from the evidence of Mr. Macdonald, the manager of the Times, that the resolution to print the facsimile was taken very suddenly—that is, it was determined on a Saturday to print it on a Monday, and on Monday it appeared, and a division on the second reading—a crucial stage—of the Coercion Bill was expected to take place, and did take place, on that very night, April 18, 1887.

It further appears that when this facsimile was printed, for the purpose of influencing the House of Commons on a measure of extraordinary severity directed against one portion of the United Kingdom, Mr. Macdonald, the manager, knew nothing of the origin of the letter, except what Mr. Houston told him, and Mr. Houston, who supplied it, knew nothing except what Mr. Pigott had told him, and Mr. Pigott was well known to be what we call in this country a "dead beat" of nearly twenty years' standing. This remarkable step, too, had been preceded by a formal announcement that Mr. Parnell's denial of the authenticity of the letter imputing to him complicity with assassins, would not have the slightest weight, and that nothing would induce the editor of the Times to say who gave him the letters, because, if he did, this person would surely be murdered. We believe this was the first case on record in which a person of good social standing (and not a blackmailer) produced a letter injurious to another man's character, and absolutely refused to state all his reasons for believing it to be genuine. Of course, in a case of this kind, the history of the letter is all important. To withhold this history, while treating or using the letter as authenticated, would in private life be considered infamous. The fact that so many honorable and high-minded Englishmen were led by their hatred of the Irish party to acquiesce in the Times' view of its obligations, is perhaps as striking an argument in favor of home rule as the whole controversy has produced. It illustrates that state of the English mind on Irish questions which has made Irish history such a dismal tale.

The denouement of the tragi-comedy which has since last November been dragging its slow length along before the Parnell Commission, came on Tuesday, in London, when Sir Charles Russell announced on the opening of the court that Pigott had confessed the forgery of the letters and had fled. He added, moreover, that he was prepared to prove that Pigott had been forging signatures to a greater or less extent since 1878, and that he had invested the money he got from the Times—some thousands of pounds—in an obscene-literature business. A warrant has accordingly been issued for Pigott's arrest, and at this writing the Attorney-General is in doubt whether he will proceed any further with the case. We do not need to point out the probable effect of all this on the fortunes of the London Times. The pecuniary loss, present and prospective, to that journal is of course enormous; the loss of confidence and influence is simply incalculable and certainly irremediable. In the hands of different men the paper might recover, but in those of its present managers it seems hopeless.

What is of most importance in the affair is its bearing on the fortunes of the present Ministry and on the Irish question. It is safe to say that any other Ministry which has held office since the passage of the Reform Bill, would have resigned at once under a blow of this kind, because the present Ministry has done everything it could to identify its fortunes with those of the Times in the pursuit of Parnell and his followers. The Times has been furnished with all the official documents it needed, with the assistance and testimony of all the police and magistrates and of the salaried Government spies like Le Caron, or Beach, and though last, not least, with the services of the Attorney-General as counsel. The powers of the court, too, were defined in the Act of Parliament which created it, in spite of the protests of the Liberals, in such a way, to suit the Times—that is, the field of inquiry was made so large, vague, and indefinite—that the framing of issues would be impossible, and judges would be unable to shut out any evidence on the ground of irrelevancy. Accordingly every crime and outrage committed in any county of Ireland was admitted as proof, more or less strong, in support of the thesis that the Irish members of Parliament were the accomplices of assassins, "moonlighters," and other offenders against persons or property. On top of them came the forged letters intended to show that Parnell was actually cognizant of and approved of the murders of Burke and Cavendish, and of the plot to murder Mr. Forster.

In legislating in this way for the benefit of the Times, the Ministry were undoubtedly giving a quid pro quo. When, after coquetting with the Irish in 1885, denouncing coercion, and half promising Home Rule, they found in 1886 that Gladstone's scheme was so unacceptable to the English constituencies that they could get a majority in the House without the help of the Irish, they fell back once more on the natural Tory plan of "resolute government" or "rigorous policy." In other words, determined on a plan of coercion which should have certain novel features. One was that the bill should be perpetual in its operation, and not limited in point of time, as all previous ones were; another was, that the power of imprisonment at hard labor as common felons under it should be given to removable justices of the peace, sitting without a jury, and that it should cover speeches or writings which should, in the eyes of these jurists, have a tendency to promote boycotting or non-payment of rent, or to prevent people from taking evicted farms. To get a bill like this passed, with the help of the Liberals who had deserted Gladstone, and large numbers of whom had pledged themselves on the stump against coercion and in favor of the government of Ireland by ordinary equal laws, of course was not an easy matter. Englishmen were not quite prepared for anything so drastic as putting it in the power of the Irish Secretary to thin the benches of the Opposition by shutting up the opponents of the government in jail on plank beds. To carry it through, it was absolutely necessary that the Irish members should be made to figure in English eyes as common criminals, the friends and companions of assassins, so that public opinion should be prepared for any coercion bill however ferocious.

This work the Times undertook by producing the pamphlet so widely known as "Parnellism and Crime," and by a series of articles on the Irish members, of extraordinary ferocity, in which they were really described as unfit for human society. When the Coercion Bill was ready for its second reading, facsimiles of the forged Parnell letters were produced on the morning before, and accepted by the supporters of the Government as genuine, and the bill went through with a rush. Parnell's indignant denial was received with derisive laughter, and the Times treated it as an aggravation of his crimes. English society then started that system of prosecution in which a certain portion of it always delights. Not only were the Irish members treated as the vilest of their species, but a strict boycott was set on foot against everybody who would associate with them. To have dined with Parnell or Healy entailed a sentence of exclusion from all Tory and Unionist drawing rooms, and the "immorality" of the Home Rulers became a favorite topic of semi-sacred journals like the Spectator, as well as of common secular Jingoes like the Telegraph and Saturday Review. Parnell—a very sick man—was pursued in city and country by reporters, who daily reported his movements as those of an escaped criminal, and threw out the most odious insinuations about his walk and conversation. In fact, it is not too much to say that the life of the Irish members in London during the past two years, under the baiting of the Times, has been as near an approach to "hell upon earth" as is possible in a well-policed Christian city. The bulk of them were men of the ordinary somewhat coarse type which peasants have to elect when they have but few gentlemen on their side; but Parnell, and Sexton, and Dillon, and others are men of education and refinement, on whose health and spirits these long protracted social barbarities could not but tell. At last the day of reckoning has come, and the whole "fabric of iniquity," as Mr. Gladstone has called it, has fallen to pieces through the confessions of a forger, blackmailer, and vender of obscene literature. On this wretch, whom the conductors of the Times actually forebore to inquire about lest they should ruin their game, nine-tenths of the superstructure seems to have rested.

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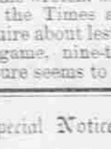

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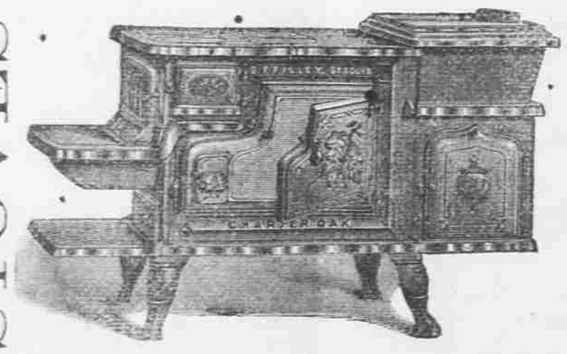

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